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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1793
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 1364
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1563
RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 0519
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0927
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000435

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [TN](#)
SUBJECT: TONGA PLAYS "IRAQ" CARD RE VISA ISSUE: ACTION
REQUEST

REF: A. SUVA 349 (AND PREVIOUS)
[1](#)B. USDAO SUVA 131933Z AUG 07

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The Tonga Government has reiterated, by dipnote, its intense desire for the USG to find a way to provide visa services in Tonga, rather than in Suva. The dipnote says, absent progress on the visa issue, "the Tonga Government will not be disposed to assisting the United States in the military or other fields." Tonga Defense Service (TDS) troops are about to enter Iraq on a second six-month deployment, with plans for yet another six-month deployment to follow. It is not clear if the King and TDS Commander, who have driven the deployments, cleared on the dipnote's threat. We have explained U.S. visa constraints repeatedly to Tonga leaders. They respond that surely the superpower can find a visa solution for Tonga. Tonga's Foreign Secretary will visit Suva next week to discuss the issue

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again. We request any new ideas that we might offer to address the visa issue and help reward Tonga for its PKO efforts. High-level visitors to Tonga in the coming weeks will need ammunition on the visa issue, as well. End summary.

Tonga threatens mil/mil relations over visa issue

[1](#)2. (U) Embassy Suva received on Sept. 6 Tonga Ministry of Foreign Affairs dipnote F.2/36/3 dated 5 Sept. 07. The substantive text reads:

...the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Va'inga Tone, would like to call on H.E. Mr. Larry Dinger on Tuesday 11 September 2007 at the Embassy. Arrangement is now being made for the Secretary to travel to Suva on 10 September 2007 and return

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on 12 or by 14 September 2007.

The purpose of the Secretary's visit is to personally bring up to the attention of the Ambassador, yet again, the priority and urgency with which the Tongan Government views the exorbitant costs that Tongans have to pay to travel to Fiji to apply for their U.S. visa. It may be recalled that, for close to ten years now, this matter has been raised numerous times by the Tonga Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York and by the Ministry in Nuku'alofa. Sadly, however, no progress has been attained as yet. With Tonga's assistance to the United States in Iraq, it is not

unrealistic for Tonga to ask for a quid pro quo from the United States in terms of arriving at an easier and cost effective way for Tongans who wish to apply for a U.S. visa. The Tonga Government will not otherwise be disposed to assisting the United States in the military and other fields.

The Hon. Minister for Foreign Affairs conveyed this in strong terms to the Ambassador in a recent visit to Tonga; and the Commander of the Tonga Defense Services has done likewise to the U.S. Defense Attache. The United States must seriously address the issue of visa application by Tongan nationals, either through the establishment of a consulate in Tonga in reciprocity to Tonga's consulate general in San Francisco (not to mention Tonga's Embassy in New York); or by more regular visits by the U.S. Consul to Tonga; or some other mutually acceptable arrangements.

The Ministry kindly requests the assistance of the Embassy in conveying the foregoing to the Ambassador and for seeking his kind concurrence towards the Secretary's request to call on him at a time convenient on 11 September 2007. The Ministry kindly thanks the Embassy for the assistance granted...

Wishes and current realities

13. (C) As related reftels, PM Sevele, Foreign/Defense Minister Tu'a, and Tonga Defense Service (TDS) Commander Uta'atu have made clear their frustration that the USG requires Tonga citizens to travel to Suva for visa adjudications. The round-trip airfare for such a trip is currently US\$513, and inevitably many applicants do not qualify for visas. We have repeatedly conveyed sympathy for the inconvenience, as we have explained the requirements of U.S. law and regulation, which currently require visa applicants to visit a U.S. embassy or consulate for electronic fingerprinting at the same time as the visa interview. Tonga leaders have proposed pre-screening in Tonga to weed out poor cases, or having more frequent

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consular visits, or opening a consular agency or a consulate or an embassy. We have explained that U.S. regulations do not allow pre-screening; the electronic fingerprint machine is not portable (yet), so more frequent consular visits will not solve the visa-adjudication problem; a consular agency could not do visas; and to date, the USG has calculated that an embassy or consulate in Tonga is not financially feasible.

New technology?

14. (C) The one possibility we have mentioned, after consultation with CA, is that experiments are taking place to make electronic fingerprinting portable. If that technology could be made available to Embassy Suva along with necessary additional resources (human and budgetary), the USG could experiment with having a consular officer visit Tonga periodically, perhaps one week a month, to do visa adjudications. Many details of such a process remain unclear; there would be resource implications; and the last we heard CA was discouraging the thought that the portable fingerprint technology might become available for Suva. Note: while portable fingerprinting could allow visa adjudication in Tonga, the problem of "bad cases" would remain. In fact, we presume the visa refusal rate would increase as people who cannot afford the airfare for a roll of the dice in Suva would take the gamble at home.

Playing the Iraq quid pro quo

15. (C) As expected, Tonga leaders have not appreciated the USG's inability to respond positively. With Tonga's difficult political decision this year to deploy TDS troops for a second time to the Coalition of the Willing in Iraq, Tonga leaders have taken a new approach. They have argued with emotion that, at a time when others are withdrawing from Iraq, Tonga is stepping up, reconfirming its commitment to

international peacekeeping. In return, in the Tonga view, the technically proficient U.S. superpower surely can find a way to adjudicate visas in Tonga. The new dipnote adds a threat: absent resolution of the visa issue, "the Tonga Government will not otherwise be disposed to assisting the United States in the military and other fields."

Internal Tonga dynamics?

¶6. (C) Sevele was very unenthusiastic about the TDS re-deployment to Iraq, but the King and BG Uta'atu pressed the issue and engineered a commitment to two new six-month deployments. TDS troops are currently in Kuwait preparing for the first one. We do not know yet if the new dipnote received clearance from the Palace or from the TDS, but the wording would seem to put back into doubt the second six-month deployment. While it is possible, maybe even likely, that the King and the General can keep the second deployment on track, there is no doubt that the civilian political leadership intends to utilize "Iraq" to the extent possible to leverage a fresh USG look at, and they hope a significant revision of, visa policy toward Tonga.

Comment

¶7. (C) Embassy Suva provides excellent visa services within our geographic constraint. However, there is no doubt the current requirement for Tongans to travel to Suva at considerable expense creates intense frustration in the Tongan public, and with Tongan politicians. Thus, visa policy is an impediment to U.S.-Tongan relations, at a point when Tonga is putting its troops on the line in Iraq. We would welcome new ideas for overcoming the problem. We thought the portable fingerprint option could work, but now hear not to get our hopes up. We are sketching a proposal to create a consular agency in Tonga. That would not resolve the visa problem; but it would add more visibility to our ongoing Peace Corps presence in Tonga, and such an agency might eventually house mobile visa processing if/when technology and resources permit. We are open to other ideas.

Action request: any new talking points?

¶8. (C) The Ambassador spoke with Foreign Secretary Tone today (9/6), and they agreed to meet in Suva on Thurs, 9/13. Tone acknowledged that the conversation will be a repeat, but he clearly has instructions to raise Tonga's complaint yet again and to receive a USG response. Please advise what new we can

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say, if anything. We note that high-level military and civilian USG visitors are expected to travel to Tonga in the next few weeks. They will need to be ready with talking points.
DINGER